THE
HISTORIAN
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

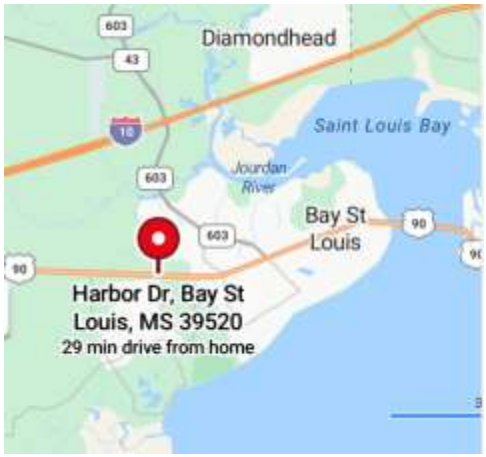
Website: www.hchsm.org

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi — January 2026

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, January 15, 2026. The luncheon will feature Barbara Lewis and Constance Townsend, who are descendants of Choctaw Chief Pushmataha. They will speak on Native American culture and history.

Reservations are required and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call no later than *noon on Wednesday, January 14*** to make your reservation. Seating is limited to forty-eight (48) people, and we need to order the correct number of lunches. **Served at noon, lunch is $15.00 for members and $17.00 for non-members,** payable at the door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday at noon prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by noon on Wednesday prior to the luncheon if at all possible so that the society does not incur unnecessary expenses. It is catered by Almost Home Catering with Chef Michelle Nichols. The menu for the luncheon this month is **blackened chicken, grits casserole, green beans, yeast rolls, and eclair cake.**



THE OLD MAN'S STORY ABOUT THE GOLD

By
Thomas Hoke
Georgie Morton, editor

Part 1: The Old Man's Story

In 1954, our family owned 16 acres on the west side of Harbor Drive, just north of what became Bayou Philips Estates in later years, just outside Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Just north of Harbor Drive, where it curves to the West and South of where the water starts, one evening, my brother and I were told a story by a 99-year-old Choctaw man who had lived in his small home all of his life....

"When I was 7 years old, I watched unseen from the woods one rainy evening at the start of the Civil War, when I heard a wagon turn off the Old Spanish Trail and come up Harbor Drive. The big wagon was driven by a soldier in uniform. The rain was getting worse, and the wagon pulled off Harbor Drive, two black men jumped out and dug a deep hole, then lifted a large metal chest carefully into the hole. An altercation followed, and both men were shot by the soldier. He then put their bodies into the hole, filled it in, and drove off. He never returned.

Part 2: A Life-Long Quest

I have spent most of my 86 years researching this True story from so long ago. I have verified that the 15,000+ gold coins buried came from The Bank of Louisiana and the Bank of New Orleans and that they were $20 gold pieces made at the New Orleans Mint and legally exchanged for British currency, payable to an officer of the bank.

That officer was Johnson Kelly Duncan, a Superintendent in the Public Works Department at the New Orleans Mint.

Another friend of Duncan was named Beauregard. On April 13, 1861, Beauregard started the Civil War by firing on Fort Sumter. Duncan slipped into his Confederate uniform and took his legally exchanged $20 gold coins from the two banks, put them into a large iron chest, and headed east from New Orleans.

Brig. Gen. Johnson Kelly Duncan
Source: Johnson K. Duncan - Wikipedia

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
Lobrano House Director

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LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS
MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
CLOSED 12—1 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

A postcard dated July 12, 1907, showing the New Orleans Mint during its last few years of operation as a branch mint facility.
Source: New Orleans Mint - Wikipedia

There was a tropical storm flooding the road as he headed east, and he was forced to turn off on Harbor Drive to the north, where he buried the treasure chest full of gold $20 coins.

Duncan became a hero for the Confederacy, but he was captured and died in prison in Tennessee, and never had the chance to go back to Harbor Drive for his treasure.

His heirs knew the story, and they continued to search for it through the years. We sold our 16 acres in 1980, and the deed of trust for our property was issued in about 1982 to Johnson Kelly Duncan, and we never realized it until 1994, in my first story published about "The New Orleans Mint Treasure." I had a call one day, and my caller ID had a New Orleans code and the name Johnson Kelly Duncan on it. He only asked one question: "Was that a picture of your house on Harbor Drive in the story? That was the property we bought in 1982!"

The secret to the truth in the story lies in what is called "The Gold Book." It is a journal of the records of legal gold exchanges at the New Orleans Mint from 1850 to 1861.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our monthly newsletter, *The Historian*, is the voice of the Historical Society. Reporting our monthly "news" is an important segment; however, recounting the history of our county is what gives us purpose.

Thanks primarily to Charles Gray, Jim Keating, MD, and Eddie Coleman, we have been able to produce interesting and informative articles. With the passing of Charles (2022) and Jim (2025), Eddie and other volunteer writers have continued to produce a very high-quality product.

To expand our contributing writers, we are asking our readers to share their knowledge and stories about growing up in cities and rural areas that make up Hancock County. While some articles may be filled with historical moments, dates and places, others are simply about individual and life events that make where we live special to us.

When families gather, there are always stories told, and these stories need to be written, to be shared with others, and to be preserved for future generations. Writing does not have to be intimidating; just write in your "voice", as though you are telling the story. Our proofreaders can format and edit as needed to make it a finished product.

Best of the New Year to you and yours!

Chris Roth

The crucial year is 1861, because it proves British gold sovereigns were exchanged for U.S. gold coins, and on April 15, 1861 they were given to an officer of the mint! Guess who that was?

If you ask on Artificial Intelligence if any U.S. gold coins were ever exchanged for British Gold through the Bank of Louisiana or the Bank of New Orleans in 1861, right before the Civil War, the answer is "No!" The answer is wrong! AI does not know everything! The detailed records show otherwise.

The gold is still out there, maybe in your backyard. I want you to know the story was TRUE!

And I want you to go for the gold!

THE MAN WHO LIT UP BAY SAINT LOUIS

By Chris Roth
Georgie Morton, Editor

Albert Leitch (A.L.) Stokoe
March 31, 1873-March 5, 1925

Not only did he provide the first electricity to the city, but he also kept every ice box cool, and bottled soft drinks for refreshment.

A.L.'s family moved from Michigan to Jeanerette, LA, in 1881, where his father operated a lumber company named Milmo & Stokoe. In the late 1800s or early 1900s, A.L. moved to Bay Saint Louis, MS, where he founded Bay Ice Company, which later became Bay Ice, Light and Bottling Works.

His ice company was equipped with a state-of-the-art York Ice Machine and had the ability to produce 25 tons of ice a day. This high level of production was driven largely by the local seafood industry. He outgrew his earlier location on Blaize Avenue and built a new, modern facility,

circa 1920, adjacent to the original facility.

In support of his ice-making enterprise, A.L. installed a steam-powered generator, believed to be a first for Bay Saint Louis. Being an innovative businessman, he contracted with Bay Saint Louis to provide 120 electric streetlights and to supply power for motors, electric fans, and electric flat irons for business and residential customers.

In his day, access to the Mississippi coast markets was limited largely to overwater transportation. As with the demand for ice and electricity, A.L. saw an opportunity to facilitate the transportation of goods by establishing a wharf facility for the Bay in 1917. Daniel Carver granted Stokoe the right to build a pier and loading dock at what is now the foot of Washington Street at South Beach Boulevard. Mr. Carver, being a foresighted individual, reserved the right to build two bathhouses on the pier.

Stokoe's Wharf served as Bay St. Louis's port of call, handling a wide array of goods and services, including building materials, lumber, staples like sugar and flour, and even early automobiles transported by boat or barge from New Orleans before the highway was built.

Coca-Cola, CHEER UP, Mission Beverage, and Dr. Nut were some of the brands bottled by Bay Ice, including their own brand, Crystal Ice. There was little information available to the writer as to how long the bottling operation was in business. It is assumed that, with improved modes of transportation, there was a consolidation of bottling facilities.

In addition to his personal business involvement, A.L. was a director of Merchants Bank, now Hancock Whitney Bank, and a real estate investor. The Masonic Lodge at 129 Main Street bears the name Stokoe.

After his death in 1925, Mississippi Power purchased the electrical enterprise on Blaize Avenue. The remaining business was later sold to Randolph Ladner. Subsequently, Harry Sumrall, and later the Burge Family, operated the icehouse. In 1969, the property was severely damaged by Hurricane Camille, thus ending the era of A.L. Stokoe.

Sources:

Hancock County Historical Society and Museum
MS Department of Archives and History
Sea Coast Echo

Left: On the white cornice strip near the top is written "Stokoe Memorial Building" at 129 Main Street in Bay St. Louis.

IMPORTANT NOTICE!!

*Our fundraiser dinner previously scheduled for January 20th has been **postponed.** A new date will be announced soon.*

REMINDER!!

*The start of the New Year means it is time for **dues**! Thank you to those who have already renewed their memberships for 2026.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

*70 people have signed up for our Amtrak trip to New Orleans on January 22. **Payment for admission to the World War II Museum is due by January 12.***

We hope to plan other trips during 2026. Let us know if you have any suggestions.

Do you have suggestions for speakers for our monthly luncheons?

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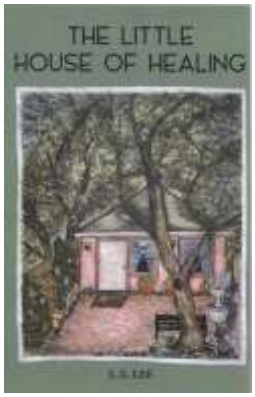

In *The Little House of Healing* by L.L. Lee, nine troubled individuals from a recently divorced woman to a courageous cancer battler, seek solace and a fresh start in the serene haven of Miss Lucy's peaceful Bay St. Louis cottage. This inspirational novel explores redemption and the resilience of the human spirit.

Available at Amazon.com, Historical Society, and some local shops in Bay St. Louis

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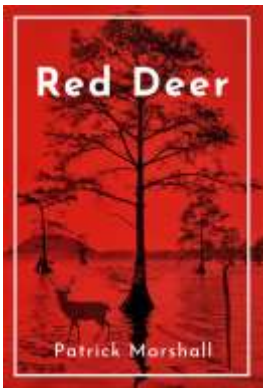

Red Deer is fantasy infused historical fiction. Jesse Walker, a 16 year old from present day Gulf Coast Mississippi, is transported back through time to the legendary birthplace of the Choctaw people, NanihWaiya village.

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